

## Communications Corner

For over seven years, Troy Conference has provided free web sites and a console management system to its churches, but as the conference transforms into its new entities, those web sites will no longer be available. Churches hosting their sites at troyconference.org will need to move to a new web provider before July 1.

There are two parts to consider when creating a web site: the web design service and the web page host provider.

Web design software can range from Open Source Console Management Systems (CMS), which are available as free downloads, to sophisticated CMS templates, available for a fee. CMS programs offer users the ability to add text, photographs, graphics and other multimedia components to build a dynamic web site.

United Methodist Communications offers the following suggestions for Open Source CMS systems:

- Drupal (<http://drupal.org/>)
- Joomla (<http://joomla.org/>)
- Plone (<http://plone.org/>)
- Web-Empowered Church (TYPO3) (<http://www.webempoweredchurch.org/>)
- Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org/>)

Each of these programs varies in its degree of difficulty to master and its flexibility with dynamic content. Some provide online support and how-to manuals or tutorials. All (with the exception of Wordpress) will require a hosting service to publish your web pages to the Internet. Generally, you will need to register your domain name and set up email accounts, but these may be included with the hosting service you choose (see below).

Web or template-based CMS programs for website design and development that are very easy to use and require little or no technical experience. Generally these also include hosting, domain name registration and email accounts in the monthly fee for the services. Options here include:

- ACS Technologies Extend Platform (<http://www.extendplatform.com>)
- E-zekiel (<http://umc.e-zekiel.com>)
- Connecting Members (<http://connectingmembers.com>)
- Clover Sites (<http://cloversites.com>)

Pricing ranges from as little as \$12 per month (E-zekiel) to more than \$100 per month depending upon the services and options you select. Most allow you to upgrade as your Web ministry needs expand. To explore a more comprehensive list of CMS solutions for churches, visit the Great Church Websites page at <http://www.greatchurchwebsites.org> and select the "Choose a CMS" tab.

### Hosting Options:

If the website design option you choose does not include hosting, then you'll need to secure this from a reputable service. Most hosting services will also provide domain name registration and email accounts. Key things to look for when selecting a hosting service for your church's website are:

- Reliability or "up" time at 99.9 percent
- Provides redundant connectivity
- High security protocols
- Server space of 1 GB or more
- Data transfer rates of 300 Mbps or better
- Allows virtual hosting of your domain
- FTP access
- 24/7 customer support
- Monthly site traffic reports
- Some hosting services that churches are using include:
  - Christian Web Host (<http://www.christianwebhost.com>)
  - General Board of Global Ministries (<http://gbgm-umc.org/churches>). The latter provides free server space up to 5 MB, but offers no support
  - Go Daddy (<http://www.godaddy.com>)
  - Ministry Web (<http://ministryweb.org>)
  - Network Solutions (<http://networksolutions.com>)
  - Our Church (<http://www.ourchurch.com>)
  - Ready Hosting (<http://readinghosting.com>)

Read more about United Methodist Communications web ministry suggestions and consider signing up for a Web Ministry course on-line by visiting [www.umcom.org](http://www.umcom.org).

For support or assistance, contact Sandra Brands at (518) 584-8214, ext. 15 or [sbrands@troyac.org](mailto:sbrands@troyac.org).

*Excerpted from United Methodist Communications web ministry article.*



*For the fifth year, a Troy Conference Volunteer-in-Mission team led by Mike and Pat Thomas will travel to Belfast, Northern Ireland, to work with the Forthspring Community Center and Springfield Road Methodist Church, May 4 through 13.*

## Volunteers-in-Mission News

*by Jay and Cathie Dunkleberger*

Volunteers-in-Mission (VIM) are one way United Methodists offer their skills and talents for Christian Service at home or abroad on short-term assignments in areas affected by disasters and hardships. A missionary movement of the United Methodist Church, VIM sends short term volunteer teams into areas of need to work on construction and spiritual formation projects. For more information on any of these projects, contact Jay Dunkleberger at (518) 371-7071 or [jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com](mailto:jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com).

**Leadership Training:** A Team Leader Training will be held March 12, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., location to be announced. The cost is \$15, and includes lunch and a manual.

**Belfast Peace Project Team, May 4 through 13:** Mike and Pat Thomas are leading a VIM Team to travel to Northern Ireland. This will be the fifth year Troy Conference has sponsored this team. The cost is estimated at \$2,300, which includes all travel from the Capital Region. Forthspring, Belfast Central Mission, Cornerstone and Springfield Road Methodist have been at the fore front of the peace-making efforts in Northern Ireland. For more information, contact Pat or Mike Thomas at (518) 885-5889 [ormthomas6@mac.com](mailto:ormthomas6@mac.com).

**Cedar Rapids Flood Recovery Team, Sept. 25 through Oct. 3:** Jack Hill will be leading a VIM team to assist in the block-by-block rebuilding of homes in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. There is a \$60 registration fee to cover, insurance, printing, and postage for all members. The estimated cost of the trip will be near \$400 including transportation, hotels, and meals. For further information, contact Jack Hill at [vhill@yahoo.com](mailto:vhill@yahoo.com).

**Hinton Rural Life Center, Oct. 10 through 16:** Jay and Cathie Dunkleberger will be leading a team to the Hinton Center in Hayesville, N.C. It will be a mixed team for economic recovery and small church support. Activities will include construction and maintenance support at the Hinton Center as well as projects in the community. The estimated cost of insurance, lodging, and food is \$250, not including transportation to Hayesville, N.C.). For further information, contact Jay or Cathie Dunkleberger at [jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com](mailto:jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com).

**Short-term VIM opportunities:** There are local projects that need teams for one to several day periods. Emmaus Church in Albany, N.Y., is one of these that has had extensive help, and more is being scheduled. Contact Pete Huston at [hustonjp@sprynet.com](mailto:hustonjp@sprynet.com) or (518) 399-0919 for more information.

Several other projects are in the pipeline for which work is being defined and priorities set. Teams are needed. If you have some time and are interested in a short term effort, contact Jay Dunkleberger at [jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com](mailto:jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com) or (518) 371-7071, and a leader will be identified and a team formed.

### Leadership Opportunities:

Contact the Dunklebergers [jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com](mailto:jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com) or (518) 371-7071, if you can consider leading a team. We'll provide leadership training and help you find team members and a place to serve. There are needs that swamp our ability to field teams to address them. Teams are going many places from the other 3 Upper New York conferences with which we are merging. Now is a good time to start making connections. Contact us if you would like to form a combined team or be a part of one.

## Upstate food banks find increase in need

By Nelson Price

Upstate New York food banks are experiencing increased requests for help from families struggling to place food on their tables in this time of economic stress and holiday pressures.

A survey of 21 food banks operated by or related to United Methodist churches revealed increased requests of up to 50 percent; the average increase is about 20 percent.

The 21 banks are providing 534,000 meals per year to about 225 families comprising 2,177 children, 2873 adults, and 508 seniors—a total of 6,359 individuals served monthly. Dollar costs per family range from zero, where all food is donated, to \$22 with the average at \$12.46 in cash costs.

Budgets for the pantries vary widely.

Some operate with no budget and rely totally on donated food. Others purchase food, receive supplies from a Food Bank and super markets, and also accept food donated by church members and community organizations.

The combined cash budgets amount to \$222,902 annually, but that is only a portion of what the churches and communities contribute, according to the survey. Space, heat and lights are provided without charge by the churches.

In addition, thousands of hours are contributed by volunteers to manage, stock and service the pantries. Seventeen pantries reported a total of 343 volunteers who contributed 2,672 hours per month. On an annual basis, that is 32,064 hours and at \$8 per hour,

is worth \$256,512.

"But that is only half the story," according to Bishop Susan W. Hassinger of the Albany Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church. "Children who are well nourished and are not hungry learn more easily. Parents who aren't as stressed are better care-givers. It is about changing lives and increasing potential. It's not stop-gap; it is a long range ministry that helps children and adults change their lives for the better both now and in the future."

A pastor observed that The Pantry "opens the doors of the church for those who wish to enter. There they will find a loving and caring community. That's what pantries are really about: building community both within and outside the church."

The Rev. Holly Nye, Conference Minister for Troy Annual Conference of United Methodist Church, observed that the U.S. Department of Agriculture just reported prior to Thanksgiving that 49 million Americans face "food insecurity" and struggle to provide healthy food for their families. There are 17 million children—22.5 percent—in these families.

"Every pantry in Upstate New York needs donations of canned food and cash," Nye said. "A gift to a food pantry in honor of someone 'who needs nothing more' would make gift giving dollars serve the true spirit of this holiday season."

*Price is a member of the Upper New York Communications Task Force.*

## Outreach can be transformed in small group settings *from page 3*

The small group will have a weekly meeting when folks are encouraged to reflect on the week in general and the service time in particular. They will seek to discover the times and ways when God seemed present in their experiences, when it was more difficult to see God, and they will share how they responded. Some questions to use are suggested below.

The group can write a covenant prayer. It will include their expectations of themselves and of each other, as well as how they will work with the folks they are serving and how they will strive to keep God in the center of their work. Each person can have a copy of the covenant and it could be displayed in the work area during work hours.

The group will find something to symbolize the way Christ is present to them in their work. The symbol might arise out of a conversation held during the initial meeting when group members would share why they agreed to be in the group. The symbol will be placed where the workers can see it in their work area. Examples of this could be a framed quote, such as "I am the Bread of Life" or "come to me and never hunger," or a symbol of the light of Christ (perhaps not a lit candle for safety reasons). Looking at the symbol will serve as a reminder of why the volunteers are serving.

Before the food shelf (or other activity) opens, the workers can spend time together in prayer and getting centered. During this time, the Christ symbol can be placed visibly in the workspace as a reminder of Christ's presence. The group can pray collectively their covenant prayer before setting to work. These practices help to center the group into being an expression of Christ's love and not just folks who are giving out food.

The weekly meeting will be scheduled at a time that best fits the group—it might meet right after the service activity or it could be at a different time when folks have had time to reflect on the experience. The meeting starts with brief worship—a song or two, scripture and/or a spiritual reading, and brief reflection. Then there is time for the group members to individually offer their responses to the reflection questions. During the first meeting, the group will decide the time for each activity and how long each person can have to respond, probably no more than 10 minutes per person. Paying attention to the time allowed will be part of the group covenant. The group meeting closes with time for prayer and blessing.

Group members are encouraged to start a journal to record their thoughts and feelings after each work experience. Some may find it easier to draw a picture or

symbol of what they saw or felt.

Each person who comes for outreach assistance has a story. As Christians we are called into relationship with God and with neighbor. How will we respond to the stories that come in our doors? Here's an example of a situation and differing individual responses that might be shared in a small group:

A nicotine-drenched man with several days' growth of beard and dirt under his fingernails comes to the food shelf. To one person he may simply be someone down on his luck and in need of food, but to another, he will present as someone whose life story is full of heartache or bad decisions.

In the small group, the conversation is not speculation about the lives of the people who were served. It will be about the workers' experiences with the people they are serving and God's invitation to respond.

One member of the small group might say, "When I saw one man today, I felt a sudden surge of compassion and tears came to my eyes. I wanted to talk to him but I didn't know how to start the conversation or what I'd do once I heard it. I feel as though I let Jesus down."

Another would say, "I saw a man today who looked down and out, but when I gave him the food and smiled at him, his face lit up like I'd given him a thousand bucks. It made me feel great. I told him we had a community dinner on Friday and I'd see him there if he'd like to come. Maybe God is inviting me to have a conversation with him."

Another member of the group might say, "When I saw one man today, I felt myself pull back and I couldn't look at him. I think it reminded me too much of a life I left behind. I'm not sure what God wanted me to do at that moment."

Folks who are reticent to working in outreach projects may have a sense of compassion (recognized or unrecognized) that draws out emotional responses they may not know how to handle. We are gifted in different ways and will respond to our experiences in our own unique ways. Having a small group setting to share these reactions and to keep focused on God's work in us, in our activities, and in those we serve will help to keep outreach work Christ-centered.

Here are some questions the small group can use for reflection on the outreach activity. Members should keep a journal of responses and review them before the small group meeting.

- How did you experience (see, feel, sense) God\* at work?
- When did God seem close?
- When did God seem distant?
- Where did you hear the gospel proclaimed?
- What kinds of poverty did you see?
- What gifts did you see in those you served?
- When did you have a sense of failure or discouragement?
- What signs of hope did you see?
- Where did you see hospitality offered or received?
- What visual image stays with you?
- How are you feeling called to respond to this experience?
- What is God inviting you to do?
- Do you have a special prayer request for yourself or others?

(\*Note: God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit could be used where "God" is written.)

For a workshop or help getting a small group started, contact Evie Doyon, Faith Development Coordinator, Troy Annual Conference, at [eviedo@gmail.com](mailto:eviedo@gmail.com) or (802) 485-7144.

### Creating a new family album...

Send us a "family photo" of the life of your congregation—be creative! Include as many people as possible, in an activity or setting that expresses something about your shared life and ministry!

E-mail photos to Sandy Brands, Communicator in Troy Conference: [sbrands@troyac.org](mailto:sbrands@troyac.org).

Photos should be of at least "me-

dium" resolution. Include contact information including e-mail and phone, and the name of the church. Photos will be used on the web and at conference gatherings — share the life of your congregation with your sisters and brothers of Upper New York.

## District class makes confirmation richer for youth

It's time to start confirmation classes, only there's just one or two youth in the church ready to start. Such a small number doesn't auger well for a successful program.

"For the youth and the teachers [of the class], that tends not to be much fun at all," said the Rev. Michelle Bogue-Trost, pastor of the Newtonville United Methodist Church in New York. "If one or two youth from a three-person confirmation class has to be absent, conversation fails."

Recognizing that this scenario was common in a number of churches, Bogue-Trost and Albany District Superintendent the Rev. Jim Fenimore explored the idea of starting a district-wide confirmation class. The first Albany District Confirmation Class took place two years ago, and the program was such a success, they decided to do it, again.

"We found it was a great way for youth to connect with youth outside their own church," Bogue-Trost said. "We also found that the [class] discussion was much richer."

Both Bogue-Trost and Fenimore believe that the district-wide class not only enriches the classroom experience for youth, it helps build bonds between youth across the connection and reinforces the understanding that "all United Methodists are not exactly like the ones they find in their home churches," she said.

For Fenimore, the district-wide class is part of the larger emphasis he's placed on building connections between churches and people on a district level. It strengthens the understanding that the local United Methodist church is part of a bigger network of a global faith community.

The first confirmation class had about 12 students two years ago, Fenimore said. "Then we developed the program for this year and were quite surprised to have 40 kids—we had hoped for 20."

"Forty youth provide a rich ground for experience, opinion, sharing, and cooperative learning," Bogue-Trost said. "And they have much more fun!"

It's also more interesting for most of the youth, Fenimore said. "Even if the material they are studying is not that exciting, the idea of gathering together in this large group builds excitement and energy."

Instead of a weekly class held over 10-weeks, the Albany District Confirmation Class meets for four overnight retreats.

Eighth-grade or older youth are invited to take confirmation classes to learn about the church and decide whether or not they want to become part of a community of faith.

"The purpose of [the class] is to prepare [them] to make an informed decision concerning whether or not they will choose to confirm the vows made on their behalf at their baptism, claim their discipleship as their own, and join

their home church as members," said Bogue-Trost.

Using the Living the Questions video curriculum designed for young adults, "Dream, Think, Be, Do," and some United Methodist Communications resources on United Methodism, the class explores what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and how United Methodists live out that commitment.

"We have incorporated a visit to a synagogue, a visit from our bishop [Susan W. Hassinger of the Albany Episcopal Area], and a hands-on mission experience, along with team-building exercises and small group-processing to supplement our plenary learning," Bogue-Trost said. "Pastors serve as small group leaders, and have the freedom to lead extra sessions with the youth from their own church."

"Youth who choose to become church members are confirmed in their home congregations."

The district-wide class has made it possible for youth to participate in learning experiences they might not otherwise experience. For example, at the second confirmation retreat, held in December, the group visited a local synagogue on the first night of Hanukkah.

"The youth of that congregation led in worship, and our youth were fascinated," said Bogue-Trost. "When the rabbi spent some time following worship with our youth, their questions were wonderful and engaging. It was a treat to observe."

The third retreat in February offered several of those moments, she said. "Once the youth started responding, they participated wonderfully—even the most reluctant of the students contributed to the conversation in creative ways."

Bishop Susan W. Hassinger of the Albany Episcopal Area visited during the third retreat.

"[The students] were genuinely interested in hearing her story and asking questions of her, interacting in some wonderful and surprising ways," Bogue-Trost said.

It's not always easy to keep a group of tweens and teens interested and engaged.

"We know these youth are, for the most part, compelled to attend by their parents," she said. "It's a given that most would not attend on their own. We do begin with high expectations—we expect the youth to participate and to contribute to the experience. Some rise to the expectation, others do not, but the dynamics of the interchange tend to be fruitful."

As the youth learn about discipleship and church membership, the retreat leaders are learning how to make the experience better for all involved.

"We have been adjusting and improving this model since the first retreat," Fenimore said. "Each time it gets better and the last retreat was a very good one. [The youth] are starting to get it and we



Bishop Susan W. Hassinger, holding the symbolic shepherd's crook, shared her faith story with the youth of the Albany District Confirmation Class in February.

are beginning to better understand how to engage 40-8th graders."

"If we want to avoid those Ben Stein [who played the monotoned-voiced economics teacher in *Ferris Bueller's*

*Day Off*] moments we need incentives for answering questions," Fenimore agreed.

"Candy," Bogue-Trost said. "Lots of candy."

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**UMCOR**  
United Methodist Committee on Relief  
**Be There. Be Hope.**

Residents in Port-au-Prince, Haiti search for survivors among the debris on January 13, 2010, one day after a 7.0 earthquake rocked the country. Haiti's president said he feared thousands were dead after the presidential palace, schools, hospitals, and hillside shanties collapsed, leaving the Caribbean nation appealing for international help.  
REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz/Courtesy of www.Alemt.org

**Give through The Advance to Haiti relief at [www.umcorhaiti.org](http://www.umcorhaiti.org)**

## Revitalized congregation balances tradition

By Sandra Brands

From the outside, the Adirondack Community Church in Lake Placid, N.Y., is a quaint stone church set in a mountain village that hosts a steady stream of visitors, and Olympic hopefuls.

Inside, despite the Gothic architecture, dark pews and stained glass windows, the space is surprisingly contemporary. The altar is gone, rows of pews at the back of the worship area have been removed and walls have been blown away, creating a multipurpose gathering space.

Visitors walking in through the heavy wooden doors and the small, bright outer room might be surprised to find themselves standing in an area set up like a reception area. Coffee, tea and juice are spread out on one table to the left of the center aisle near stacks of ceramic mugs. To the right, food is offered—not just cookies, but crudités on skewers, dips, fruit and coffee cake.

This hybrid of the traditional and the modern reflects the philosophy of the congregation. The early morning service is as much a nod to tradition as the Gothic architecture and stained glass windows; the mid-morning contemporary service and the fellowship area in the back of the sanctuary are a nod to the understanding that the church must embrace the future.

The members of Adirondack Community Church seem to be handling that balancing act quite well.

That's not to say the changes happened over night, came without a cost.

"Even among those who thought [change] was good, it was painful," said the Rev. Mark Demers, pastor.

Demers, who has served the church for almost 15 years, said it was very important that he was able to stay with the church through the transition. The congregation recognized that, even when the work was hard and sometimes heartbreaking, he would stay with them.

That commitment was necessary, said former Lay Leader Daniel Lundin. "One of the things we've attempted to do over the years is establish the mission and vision of the church," he said, "and then working together on strategic planning. That requires a commitment on the part of the pastor, and that's what the laity and leadership of the church need to feel."

Member Jennifer Newhart agrees. "Mark's longevity [as pastor] did a lot to convince people that it wasn't just about coming in, changing things and running away."



Jason Leon is one of the younger members taking a leadership role in the church, which has begun attracting more 20- and 30-year-old worshippers.



The Rev. Mark Demers engages in conversation with a parishioner following the mid-morning Sunday worship. Demers, who does not wear clerical robes for the non-traditional service, plays the piano before and after his sermon.

The group that gathered around a table in the small chapel in the basement of the church all agreed that, though painful, change was necessary if the church was to survive.

Schmidt said that the changes began when Demers invited a group of people to attend the Willow Creek conference. "That showed how the church would be if it changed; and we were shown how it would be if it didn't change," she said. "We were seeing over and over in the conference that churches were closing."

While the early morning worship service, known in the church as the "skiers' service," remained a traditional service, it was moved upstairs to the sanctuary from the small chapel in the basement—a move that some long-time members did not appreciate at first.

It has since begun to grow, Demers said. "The 9 a.m. service is a blessing. It is not a throwaway service—they hear the same message, but they sing hymns instead of songs."

Gradually, recognizing that their needs and interests were being heard, though, many of the traditionalists recognized that they were not being thrown away.

"We consciously made sure that no one thought they were being cast aside," said Newhart. "We weren't going to leave them behind unless it was their choice."

Including people who got angry or offended in the conversions was one of the best things the congregation did, said Penny Schmidt. "We as a church family have attempted to keep in touch with people to keep them in the loop to the extent they want to be kept in the loop. Although we've lost some people, we've

gained people. The shift I'm seeing is that we're seeing a lot of younger people."

"It's been prayerful change," agrees member Judith Clausing-Lundin. "It takes a lot of prayer and guidance and direction from the Lord to make these changes. Not everyone is happy all the time, but we older people have to recognize that the church belongs to younger folks."

In addition to making some basic design changes in the sanctuary, the congregation at Lake Placid invested in audio-visual equipment and began using images and audio, something those raised in the electronic and digital ages expect. A core team of leaders also attended training in "the life-transformation effectiveness of local churches" offered by Willow Creek Association, a not-for-profit organization specializing in church leadership development.

A less traditional mid-morning service was introduced as a more relaxed and more attractive alternative for younger people. That meant not worrying so much when people took refreshments with them to the pews once worship started. Even Demers sheds his clerical robes and, when worship begins, takes his seat behind the piano to play with a three-piece group while lay members open the service.

"The congregation made a concerted effort to make sure young people coming are put in places where their voices can be heard," said Demers. "Their voices need to be heard, and their opinions honored."

"We have gotten a lot of awareness about having 20- and 30-years-olds amongst us and have heard from them about wanting to be more involved," said Schmidt. "We have had conversations about turning